

EDITORIAL

Splendor in the Grass

Sometime this spring, when you're stuck on Chestnut Street awaiting a chance to take a left on to 3A or weighing when to circle the roundabout at Lincoln and Congress Streets, think about The Farm.

Think about the O'Neil Farm in particular and its 140 acres of woodland and pastures that straddle Autumn and Winter streets near the Kingston line. Think about the fact that it is the only dairy farm left in Duxbury, that there are no other dairy farms left on the South Shore and know that it is among a small handful of dairy farms remaining in Eastern Massachusetts. Remember that Duxbury, because of its wise and far-seeing electorate, already has the money in the bank to keep this expanse — a splendor in the grass, if there ever was one — undeveloped

Splendor in the Grass

and forever open. And, as any good farmer would say, "That ain't the half of it."

The property is owned by Carl O'Neil, a former Duxbury Fire Chief who was a member of the fire department for 30 years. His family has been farming much of the land for 175 years, and the entire parcel — originally two farms — has been in agricultural production for more than 250 years. It is presently home to 70 cows.

If you walk around the property today and see past the tractors and trucks and milking machines, you can lose yourself in history. This place, as David Hines so aptly noted, is how Duxbury must have looked 250 years ago. It has a serenity that exists almost nowhere else.

Mr. O'Neil and other visionaries from in- and outside of Duxbury want to preserve that serenity forever. They want to keep the farm a farm in perpetuity, and they propose to do so by establishing a charitable corporation that

would be financed with public and private money totaling \$4.3 million.

Here is how the money would be raised:

...More than \$900,000 has already been committed by private donors.

...\$1.5 million in public money would come from Duxbury through its Community Preservation Act account. That money is already in hand and includes \$750,000 in matching funds from the state.

...\$500,000 will be sought from the Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction program.

...\$1.4 million would come from leadership donors and private foundations and that would include about \$300,000 to be raised at the community level. (The community campaign includes a plan that would allow residents to "sponsor" a cow for about \$3,000.)

For its \$1.5 million contribution Duxbury would receive a conservation restriction on the farm that would be held by the town's conservation commission. It would forever prohibit the land from being developed.

Actual ownership of the farm would go to a charitable corporation run by a nine-member board that would be appointed by Mr. O'Neil and the Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts. Along with Mr. O'Neil and local conservationists, the Trust is the driving force in the plan to keep this land as a working farm long after the day Mr. O'Neil puts away his milking stool. The farmer, whoever he or she may be, is to be thought of as a steward, invited on to the property to earn a living and to manage the farm as a going concern. When one farmer goes, another will be found. Yet the farm forever remains.

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April 7, 2004

WILDLANDS' TRUST

The nuts and bolts of how all this is to be put together will be examined in detail over the coming weeks; at a special town meeting in early June voters will have a chance to say "Yea" or "Nay" to Duxbury's CPA contribution.

From the start we urge a yes vote to what must be considered a painless request – approving to spend money that is already in the kitty – for what is surely a magnificent undertaking. It is yet another chance to combat the drumbeat of building, building, building that so dominates much of the South Shore. Developers will always be at our door, yet with this project, we are doing far more than simply keeping them at bay.

Maintaining open space is reason enough to say "Yes" to preserving the farm. Why would we not want another expanse where hawks soar and foxes roam? Why not another place to take the road less traveled by? But beyond all that, here is a unique chance to save a piece of our past, knowing if we fail to do so now we will never again have the chance. Imagine being able to show our children that, "No," milk doesn't come from cartons and here are the cows to prove it. And how much is it worth to think we can traverse walking paths, gaze over acres of field and think, "My God, we're in another life in another place." This is our chance to pass on a priceless legacy. We cannot say "No!"